

Message Text

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FROM: AGRICULTURAL ATTACHE
PASS AGRICULTURE/FAS

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: EAGR, UR
SUBJ: SOVIET COMMENTS ON 1975 GRAIN HARVEST

1. DURING INFORMAL DISCUSSION ON CURRENT GRAIN HARVEST HELD WITH RELIABLE MIDDLE MANAGEMENT OFFICIALS OF MIN.AG. AT JOHN DEERE RECEPTION FEBRUARY 3, SOVIET OFFICIALS VOLUNTEERED TO ATTACHE THAT CURRENT OFFICIAL 140 MILLION TON ESTIMATE WAS TOO LOW. A MORE REALISTIC ESTIMATE WOULD BE ABOUT TEN MILLION TONS MORE.

2. SOVIET OFFICIALS STATED THAT STATE FARM DIRECTORS AND COLLECTIVE FARM CHAIRMEN ARE EXTREMELY CAUTIOUS IN REPORTING CROP RESULTS DURING POOR YEARS AND TEND TO UNDERSTATE RESULTS. THE END OF YEAR CENSUS OF LIVESTOCK, MOREOVER, CONFIRMED THE INTENT OF FARM MANAGERS TO MAINTAIN CATTLE NUMBERS AND FURTHER SUGGESTED TO MIN.AG. OFFICIALS THAT THE UNREPORTED GRAIN WAS HELD AS A CONTINGENCY RESERVE.

3. ATTACHE ASKED IF OFFICIAL DATA WOULD BE REVISED IN LIGHT OF THIS OBSERVATION AND WAS ADVISED THAT ONLY CSA (CENTRAL STATISTICAL ADMINISTRATION) COULD MAKE THAT ADJUSTMENT.

4. THE CANDID COMMENTS BY MIN. AG. OFFICIALS ABOUT THE GRAIN
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ESTIMATE AFTER THE RECENT OFFICIAL PLANNED ANNOUNCEMENT SUGGESTS

SOME DISAGREEMENT WITH CSAM MIN. AG. OFFICIALS, MOREOVER, HAVE MAINTAINED A RESERVED APPROACH TOWARD THE HARVEST THROUGHOUT THE YEAR, BUT RARELY SHOWED SERIOUS CONCERN. WE WOULD PREFER ABSOLUTE DATA TO A VOLUNTARY OPINION, BUT BELIEVE THAT THE INFORMATION SUPPLIED REPRESENTS SOME OFFICIAL THINKING AND SHOULD BE JUDGED ACCORDINGLY.

5. ON A RELATED SUBJECT, ATTACHE VIEWS THE IMPLIED 90 BILLION RUBLE GROSS AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION FOR 1975 AS BEING SOMEWHAT INFLATED. THE SMALL REPORTED DECLINE OF FIVE BILLION FROM 1974 IS PARTICULARLY QUESTIONED IN VIEW OF THE SHARP OFFICIAL DECLINE IN GRAIN, OILSEED, SUGAR AND FODDER PRODUCTION, AND THE LESS -- BUT STILL SIGNIFICANT -- DECLINES IN COTTON, FRUITS AND VEGETABLES. A 55-MILLION TON DROP IN GRAIN PRODUCTION FROM THE 1974 LEVEL REPRESENTS A MINIMUM ESTIMATED FIVE BILLION RUBLE DECLINE ALONE AND, WHEN CONSIDERATION IS GIVEN TO OTHER COMMODITY SHORTFALLS, THE RUBLE DECLINE OF THE CROP SECTOR BECOMES SUBSTANTIALLY HIGHER.

6. WHILE WE AGREE THAT GAINS OF MEAT, EGGS AND WOOL WOULD OFFSET SOME OF THE RUBLE LOSS IN THE CROP SECTOR, THERE WAS NO INCREASE IN MILK, AND THERE WERE SHARP DROPS IN LIVESTOCK NUMBERS. OVERALL THEN, WE WOULD BELIEVE ONLY MODEST CHANGES, UP OR DOWN, IN THE TOTAL VALUE OF THE LIVESTOCK SECTOR DEVELOPED IN 1975, COMPARED TO 1974, AND THAT THE GROSS PRODUCTION OF THE CROP SECTOR WOULD DECLINE BY MORE THAN FIVE BILLION IN 1975.

7. WHAT ALL THIS SUGGESTS IS THAT FURTHER CROSS CHECKS OF THE OFFICIAL REPORTED DATA MIGHT BE WARRANTED. IN ANY EVENT, THE OPENNESS OF SOVIET OFFICIALS TO QUESTION THE OFFICIAL GRAIN DATA AND IMPACT THAT SUCH INFORMATION MIGHT HAVE ON FEED SUPPLIES AND FUTURE GRAIN PURCHASES MERITS CONTINUED REVIEW.
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